



Centre for Sport
& Human Rights

ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT

2021 IN REVIEW AND
LOOKING FORWARD TO 2022

WELCOME TO

2022

SPORT AND HUMAN RIGHTS TO THE FORE

Mary Harvey, Chief Executive Officer

Everyone working to promote human rights in sport knows that our collective efforts are gaining in prominence, with growing awareness of why this agenda matters and where progress is being made. At the same time, we face the painful realities of ongoing harms linked to sport that must be urgently addressed so that rights abuses are prevented in the future.

Like all of society, 2021 saw the world of sport continue to confront challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this global health crisis, many in the sport ecosystem took notable steps to advance the human rights agenda. Prominent athletes continued to use their platforms to speak out on critical issues such as mental health, social justice and LGBTQI+ rights, even as many others, notably women and child athletes, continued to face serious threats and abuse. Sports bodies took noteworthy steps as well, with the most gender-balanced Olympic Games in history, the IOC publishing a Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination, FIFA launching a global consultation on safe sport, and World Athletics unveiling a new roadmap on human rights. The Commonwealth Games Federation launched the Commonwealth Sport Pride Network and the International Paralympic Committee's "We the 15" campaign bolstered calls for a more inclusive world. These and other signs of progress over the past year should be welcomed and encouraged.

Our Annual Activity Report reflects on where we at the Centre for Sport and Human Rights contributed to advancing human rights in sport during 2021. It also outlines where we aim to help lead the emerging sport and human rights field in the years ahead with our [Convergence 2025](#) strategy as our guide. As 2022 begins, we've also highlighted a number of important issues we'll be watching and working on throughout the year. Like so many others, we'll

be monitoring major sporting events taking place during 2022, notably the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games being hosted in China, the Commonwealth Games in the United Kingdom and the FIFA Men's World Cup taking place in Qatar later this year. These high-profile events understandably raise many critical questions and human rights concerns and draw attention to the responsibilities of all involved in organising and hosting them.

We know that sporting events, even those that capture global attention, cannot on their own transform the human rights situation in any country. But these events do create space to discuss needed social change. They provide important opportunities to highlight how athletes, fans and other people who are vulnerable to abuse, including migrant workers and ethnic minorities, are treated by authorities and where accountability and reforms are needed to ensure protection of human rights. These events must also serve as moments where all important actors demonstrate their own commitments to respecting human rights within their operations, and to speaking out individually and collectively where rights are being violated.

Sports bodies must be accountable for human rights harms at or connected to their events, including requiring hosts to conduct robust human rights due diligence. Sports bodies should also use their leverage to help mitigate abuses and publish issues identified and steps taken throughout the life-cycle of the event. Major sporting events during 2022 are vital opportunities for the global sport ecosystem to take stock, address longstanding issues, evolve systems and make further progress on integrating human rights due diligence within operations and across relationships at every level.

Just around the corner, Beijing 2022 takes place in the context of diplomatic boycotts by some countries due to reported human rights violations in Xinjiang province. There are also concerns over restrictions on freedom of expression, as well as ongoing geopolitical tensions related to territorial and trade interests, and criticism concerning alleged treatment of whistle-blowers at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important that civil society groups continue to call these out.

As with any Games, it will be crucial that freedom of speech is protected within the footprint of the event, that the supply chains into the Games are free of labour abuses, and that athletes, fans, the media and others are





The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games kicks off on the 4 February 2022
(Image Sandra Montanez/Getty Images)

able to operate in accordance with international standards and best practice.

In Qatar, concerns for migrant worker rights and other human rights issues in the lead up to the World Cup helped bring about legal reforms and progress on labour rights welcomed by the trade union movement and United Nations agencies. More work remains, but the approach of organisers to stakeholder engagement and the publishing of independently audited reports on worker welfare are important steps. Greater government transparency is urgently needed to

ensure implementation of reforms, as well as investigations into human rights abuses, injuries and deaths, in particular providing compensation for workers and their families who have suffered as a result of negligence or violations. It is important that the changes we have seen in Qatar accelerate, persist, and are consolidated beyond the World Cup, with a continuing focus on strengthening protection of rights.

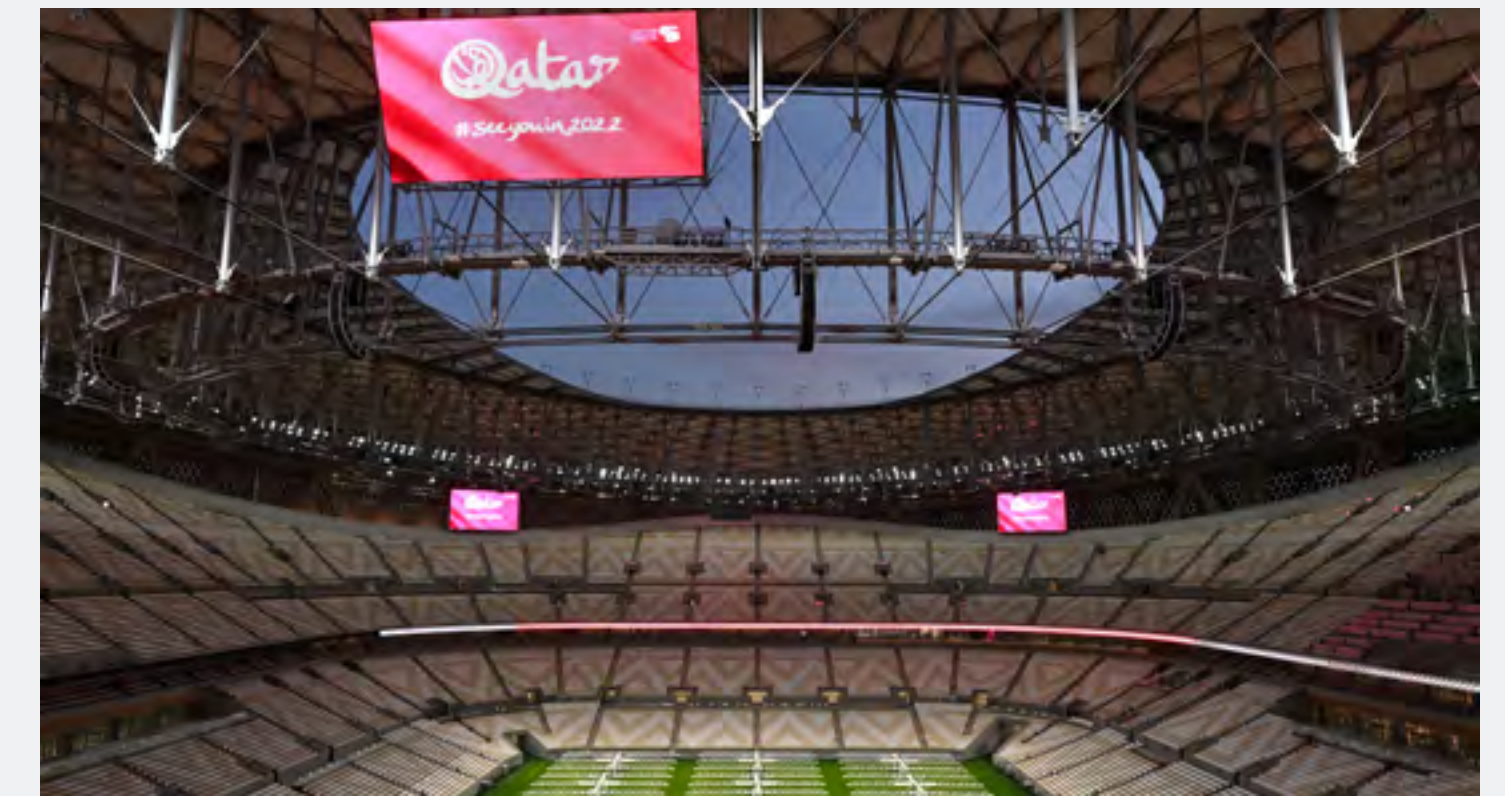
Both of these events highlight the ongoing importance of human rights due diligence and the [Sporting Chance Principles](#) in guiding action and accountability for all involved in sport, including in contexts where national legislation falls short of international standards.

「 The sport and human rights agenda can't be a passing trend. 」

The sport and human rights agenda can't be a passing trend. The range of human rights challenges linked to sport aren't just concerns for upcoming competitions, but should be on the radar of all actors hosting events and organising sport in all countries around the world. Indeed, while future events like the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the United 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup now have human rights conditions embedded in their hosting agreements, there is a pressing need to scale up the pace of implementation. Human rights risks exist everywhere, including in long-standing democracies - where systemic challenges pose ongoing threats to people, in particular those from vulnerable or historically marginalised groups. A positive legacy from 2022 will be tangible progress in embedding human rights not only into the foundations and rules for hosting major events, but also into the day-to-day practices of sports bodies as they govern their sports. If sport

is to thrive and continue to benefit from the high degree of autonomy and self-regulation that it enjoys, then a human rights-based approach must become part of mainstream practice at every level.

This can't be a year for sport to ride out controversies while it waits for "business as usual" to return. The harms to people in and around sport have been too pervasive and entrenched to expect them to vanish overnight. The world of sport is changing fast, with new competitors, formats and funding models entering the fray. Societal expectations are also rising, with new demands for excellence on and off the field of play. Within this moment of flux there is an enormous opportunity for human rights to form the foundation of a vision of responsible sport fit for the years ahead. Let's grasp this opportunity and make 2022 the beginning of a new era of sport and human rights.



The 2022 FIFA World Cup Final will take place at the Lusail Stadium on 18 December 2022 in Doha, Qatar. (Image Shaun Botterill/Getty Images)

2021 TIMELINE

JANUARY

Submitted evidence to the UK House of Lords Select Committee for a National Plan on Sport and Recreation on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sport, Modern Slavery and Human Rights

[Launched Special Podcast Series on Children, Sport and COVID-19](#)

FEBRUARY

Launched Sport and Human Rights Network on LinkedIn

Global search undertaken for diverse and representative Board of Directors

MARCH

Team grows with significant new hires adding expertise in innovations and partnerships, mega-sporting events, remedy, gender, and operations

[Podcasts released on Climate Change and Women's leadership in sport](#)

APRIL

[New website and branding launched](#)

[Podcast released on sport and disability](#)

Centre convened human rights groups, UN bodies, FIFA and the Supreme Committee with other stakeholders for an Advisory Council discussion on Labour Rights in Qatar

MAY

[Published Labour Rights in Qatar: Due Diligence Starter Kit for National Football Associations](#)

JUNE

Centre takes 2021 Action Pledge, marking World Day Against Child Labour

Centre provides training to athlete representatives and pro bono lawyers on how to recognise and respond to abuse cases in the context of The Tokyo 2020 Pro Bono Service

Centre publishes [Teaching Note](#) guidance on how to integrate human rights into sport-related education

[NBCUniversal joins the Advisory Council](#)

AUGUST

[Sporting Chance Forum 2021](#) takes place online with biggest attendance ever.

Centre co-hosts event with End Violence Against Children: Gender Dimension of the Sale and Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in Sport of Boys and Children Who Identify Outside of the Gender Binary

Centre publishes [survey](#) about impact of COVID on children and participation in sport

OCTOBER

JULY

[The Centre becomes independent from IHRB](#), launching a new governance structure and incorporating a new Association in Switzerland

New Board of Directors appointed to oversee governance and independence of the Centre

The World Athletics Human Rights Working Group presented their human rights recommendations to Congress which were approved in November 2021. This followed a year long collaboration with the Centre and Shift who supported this process

SEPTEMBER

Centre launches new strategic plan - [Convergence 2025](#)

NOVEMBER

Supported FIFA in training Human Rights Volunteers at the FIFA Arab Cup

Centre briefs BT Sport Production teams to provide deeper understanding of human rights in preparation for issues which may arise in the live environment

DECEMBER

2021 REVIEW

2021 was marked by important milestones and strengthened capacities as the Centre for Sport and Human Rights continued to engage a broad range of actors on the importance of respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights throughout the sport ecosystem. During 2021, we completed the process to become an independent organisation. As part of that process, we established a new governance structure, recruited a diverse and experienced Board of Directors, launched new digital platforms and created our strategy for the years ahead - [Convergence 2025](#).

Building a Self-Sustaining Global Organisation

The Centre took a number of steps during 2021 at the organisational level to ensure effective management and clear impacts in the years ahead. Most notably, in July we finalised the launch of our [new independent structure](#). This included formal establishment of the Centre as a Swiss Association, which consolidates our position as an important part of the ecosystem of international sports organisations and human rights institutions based in Switzerland. The past year also saw the Centre expand its operational capacity to further address the wide range of challenges in the sports and human rights arena. We welcomed six experienced professionals in key roles that build upon our existing team and cadre of expert advisors. We also continued to build our digital presence by launching a new website and brand early in the year.

Maintaining our headquarters in Geneva will be immensely valuable to our ongoing and future work to engage sports bodies, governments, UN agencies, business, and civil society, while reinforcing our human rights foundations from the global human rights hub that exists around the UN in Geneva. Our unique new governance structure, which includes formal roles for the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) embedded in our statutes, was described by our Chair Mary Robinson as an "innovative approach to having an independent organisation emerge from a multi-stakeholder process", and by Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), as a "unique piece of global architecture". The Centre's Board is now in place and worked closely with the team to review and develop our new strategy -

[Convergence 2025](#). Launched in September, the strategy sets out a vision bringing the world of sport together to collectively advance human rights under the call to action Together for Better.

Strengthening Operational Systems and Practices in Sport to Align with Human Rights Responsibilities

2021 was another busy year in our work to provide practical and rights-focused support and guidance. This included guidance for sport actors on managing the continuing impacts of Covid-19, and activities designed to support the sector to embed human rights in the delivery and legacy of major sporting events.

Following the publication of [Putting People First](#), our guidance on how sport should respond to the pandemic,

2021 REVIEW

we published [an overview of sport-related impacts of Covid-19 on children](#) and made a submission to the UK Department of Digital, Media and Sport with recommendations on mitigating the impact of the pandemic on sport. We also continued facilitating dialogue in our regular working groups on Mega Sporting Events (MSEs), remedy and safeguarding and through the Host Governments Forum. We were also represented in FIFA's Inclusion & Anti-Discrimination Working Group focussed on Qatar 2022.

A distinct strand of the Centre's work on major events during 2021 was to develop a number of thematic human rights projects with an initial focus on child rights. We facilitated collective consideration of FIFA's human rights requirements for cities in contention to host matches at the United 2026 World Cup, using this as a springboard to provide in-depth consultations for eight bidding host cities on effective methods to protect and promote child rights during event planning and delivery.

Other important work during 2021 relating to child rights included producing a MSE Child Rights Toolkit (in partnership with UNICEF, the Office of the SRSG on Ending Violence Against Children and the Oak

Foundation) and an online course, which are both currently being piloted. The aim of these resources is to provide and disseminate widely, useful human rights relevant information in formats that are easily accessible to partners around the world. The project on United 2026 is ongoing and will inform the development of other thematic projects over the coming year, including on LGBTQI+ and worker rights related issues in sport.

With respect to broadcasters, the Centre began rollout of a programme providing briefings for upcoming high-risk events. The purpose of these briefings is to inform broadcasters of risks at events they are covering and ensure they have the information needed to protect themselves and contacts on the ground, as well as to use their platform to inform viewers of potential issues in a host country. Briefings will continue throughout 2022. The Centre is also promoting an initiative led by Unicef UK and Positive Impact Events to develop Human and Child Rights and Safeguarding guidance being proposed as a possible Annex to the ISO20121 Sustainable Event Management Standard currently used at many MSEs. In 2022 we will convene sport bodies to give feedback on this guidance and learn how to give feedback in formal ISO review processes.

Nurturing Thought-Leadership, Innovation and Knowledge

Athlete and participant safety regarding Covid-19 was also a major strand of our engagement during the first half of 2021, in particular with a focus on the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games Organising Committee (TOCOG). This was among a range of other activities focused on building capacity and securing meaningful legacy on human rights from MSEs. To this end, we convened and supported bilateral information exchange between FIFA and TOCOG on best practice in promoting non-discrimination as well as convening Advisory Council and MSE Working Group meetings to share information and react to opportunities related to Tokyo 2020, Beijing 2022, and Qatar 2022.

To engage sports bodies and MSE organisers we also facilitated in-depth discussions on ways to embed human rights due diligence within specific operational contexts, including briefings on challenges and improvements to workers' rights in Qatar in the context of the FIFA World Cup. The Centre team is also engaging with partners and laying groundwork to further support the sport

ecosystem, in providing technical assistance to the Organising Committee for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 Australia & New Zealand.



*The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup will be hosted by Australia and New Zealand
(Image Jason McCawley/Getty Images)*

Alongside the Centre's programmatic activities, throughout 2021 we continued to actively promote research on sport and human rights and develop resources to inform debate and actions in a wide range of contexts. This included the launch of an ongoing podcast series on sports and human rights, a series of publications and blogs on key issues and the

development of a Teaching Note to support education on sport and human rights-related issues in higher education across a number of relevant disciplines. Further new tools and resources are in development for release in 2022.

Our major annual event, The Sporting Chance Forum, was hosted online in 2021 for the first time. This enabled us to reach a worldwide audience of over one thousand participants to engage in dialogue and information exchange with experts on a range of topics over four days. In particular, we were able to enter into several ground-breaking conversations on topics we anticipate will be talked about more and more in 2022 and beyond, including the interface between sport, climate change and human rights, the rise of women's sport and female representation in sport leadership and the media, and how to forge a responsible and rights-respecting sport leadership and culture.

Addressing Harmful Practices and Human Rights Violations in the World of Sport

The Centre continued to develop activities and engagement during 2021 on the critical issue of access

to effective remedy in sport. This work included a number of stakeholder engagement activities and the provision of expert advice. For example, the Centre provided and coordinated feedback to FIFA on its proposed safe sport initiative and also provided training to pro bono lawyers and advocacy groups at the Tokyo 2020 Court for Arbitration in Sport (CAS) Ad Hoc Tribunal on supporting athletes who have experienced human rights abuses.

These activities informed planning of our core project on remedy – the development of guidance for sports governing bodies on safe and effective and affected person-centred investigations of abuse allegations, grievance resolution and abuse prevention. We have begun working with victims and survivors, experts with lived and technical experience, to develop a shared understanding of what good practice looks like. This important project will include practical and concrete guidance on how institutions receive reports of abuse and interview affected people, to handing interim suspensions of persons of concern, and engaging survivors in co-creating better system. The project will be delivered in 2022.



FIVE

**SPORT AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES
TO WATCH IN 2022**

01 CLIMATE ACTION IN SPORT

Sport will be urged to help connect the climate and human rights agendas

Sport can't be a bystander in ongoing climate change debates and responses. Mounting threats of extreme weather, including floods, fires and rising temperatures, will increasingly impact the sporting events calendar and infrastructure, and pose greater risks to the health and wellbeing of athletes and fans, particular the young and old who are most vulnerable. The year 2022 will likely bring greater scrutiny to how sport at every level is addressing the climate crisis and making connections to responsibilities for respecting and protecting human rights.

There are important examples of sport leaders engaging on the climate agenda. Nearly 300 sports federations and members of the wider sport ecosystem have signed up to the UN's Sport for Climate Action initiative and have committed to reducing their climate impact, as well as advocating for responsible responses. Athlete activists are also highlighting the need for leadership on climate issues.

During 2022, sport leaders will also need to recognise and act on the links between climate change and respect for fundamental human rights. In 2021, the UN Human Rights Council officially recognised the right to a healthy environment and established a new expert mandate on climate change and human rights. What do these developments mean for sport?

Sport leaders have an opportunity to take targeted steps to scale up their own human rights due diligence in ways that account for actual and potential adverse impacts on people connected to climate change. This may cover a wide range of issues, from harms to individuals and communities relating to loss and damage of sport infrastructure, to land development decisions and use of scarce water supplies, to safety concerns for athletes relating to extreme heat, among many others.

The world of sport should also contribute to wider initiatives addressing the rights of those most vulnerable to climate change. Given that global sport has a significant emissions footprint globally, it is time for all involved to engage in constructive steps to manage the many transitions that are needed to address the climate crisis for those impacted today and for future sport loving generations to come.

*Stadium 974 was built for the FIFA 2022 World Cup in Qatar using recycled shipping containers.
(Image Matthew Ashton - AMA/Getty Images)*



02 CEMENTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN SPORTS GOVERNANCE

Calls will expand for leaders to fully integrate human rights in sport governance and culture

Many human rights challenges facing the sport sector can be traced back to issues of governance, leadership and culture. [Sports integrity](#) and [safe sport initiatives](#) are certainly part of the solution, but human rights are much broader and integrating these concerns into the fabric of sport requires people-centric measures to address current and historical power imbalances and protect vulnerable stakeholders.

In 2022, expectations of those in leadership positions across sport will likely intensify with calls to set the tone on human rights risks and responses. That will require leading by example, and ensuring good governance and fair processes at all levels of sport. This is necessary to make governance structures fit for purpose in human rights terms.

In sport, responsible leadership is especially important. The sector is characterised by a high degree of autonomy and self-regulation on the basis that sport is [much more than a commercial proposition](#). Indeed, the [Revised European Sports Charter](#) sets out that sport should enjoy autonomous decision-making processes and choose its leaders democratically, with governments and sports organisations recognising the need for mutual respect. In this context, if sport is truly to serve society, then autonomy should be underpinned by a strong social licence and clear systems of accountability. Those in leadership positions will need to continue to demonstrate a proactive willingness to participate in meaningful stakeholder engagement with those impacted by their decisions and to strengthen their individual and collective commitments towards the prevention and mitigation of harm. This includes sports bodies making daily efforts to gain and maintain the trust of athletes, local communities and all others they seek to represent and serve through their activities.

Tackling systemic issues including discrimination and sexual abuse now requires bold, empathetic and respectful leadership together with sincere levels of humility, transparency and openness within sports governance in order to create cultures that are truly fair, accessible, inclusive, and enabling. This means acknowledging, managing and mitigating [conflicts of interest](#). It also means transforming structures and systems to ensure greater diversity and representation within governance and management frameworks, including, in searches for talent to run sports bodies, as well as the adoption of robust codes of conduct that can be relied upon. Good governance also must include independent and transparent investigations and effective remedy processes when things go wrong.

The year ahead will see continued efforts by a range of actors to develop practical tools, guidance and materials to support sports leaders in the work they must do to adopt human rights commitments, undertake due diligence, and implement robust policy, evaluation and measurement frameworks. For those willing to step up, the roadmaps and support increasingly exist to make a positive difference and strengthen the entire sports ecosystem.



A Protect Our Players banner hangs in the stands before a match in the NWSL (Image Ira L. Black - Corbis/Getty Images)

03 GENDER FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION

Conversations on fairness and inclusion will increasingly include human rights-based approaches

The rights of transgender athletes and athletes with variations in sex characteristics will continue to be a trending sport and human rights topic in 2022. The conversation is set to move from a focus on the right to participate in competitive sport, towards how inclusion can be managed in ways that respect human rights and ensure safe and fair competition for all. Although it has been argued by some sport entities that fairness and inclusion are two irreconcilable aims under our current sport models, the challenge this year will be to move beyond these opposing views and seek innovative solutions that are, first and foremost, based on respecting the human rights of all athletes participating or competing.

The recently released [IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion, and non-Discrimination on the basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations](#) provides initial guidance in that direction, which will evolve. From March 2022 onwards, International Federations (IFs) will be responsible for defining how this framework will work in practice applied to specific sports, disciplines, and events.

The IOC has committed to providing educational webinars and workshops, and more specific guidance for those who request it, in order to support IFs in reassessing and redesigning their policies and eligibility criteria in alignment with the framework's principles. Awareness raising and capacity building for national federations, coaches, and members of athletes' own teams will be key in avoiding misinterpretations and inappropriate use of the rules at the local level. The absence of such steps have caused harm to athletes and must not be repeated. Sports governance at all levels will need to ensure that human rights due diligence processes are undertaken and if unexpected harms do occur, accessible and effective remedy is provided.

2022 will also likely see a significant increase in research conducted in this emerging area, as one of the key recommendations of the IOC framework is that diverse gender identities and variations in sex characteristics should not be assumed as an unquestionable sign of disproportionate advantage nor imply unavoidable risk to other athletes. Rather, any eligibility rules should be based on ethical, credible, and peer-reviewed research. Keeping human rights approaches at the centre of these developments will be critical in ensuring positive outcomes for all involved.

The transgender flag (top) and progress pride flag (bottom) fly at the San Francisco Cubs (Image by Lachlan Cunningham/Getty Images)



04 OVERCOMING INSTITUTIONAL EXCLUSION

Efforts to tackle institutional racism, social injustice and legacies of colonialism in sport will continue to garner global attention

Racism, social injustice and legacies of colonialism in sport are not new, but public demands to take more effective action to address them are set to take on new urgency in 2022 and beyond.

During 2021, a number of events across every continent highlighted the prevalence and harm of racism and discrimination in sport, both on and off the field of play. Examples included relentless racial abuse targeting athletes at various competitions and online; investigations into institutional racism and exclusionary practices in sport teams and clubs; ongoing criticism and debate of athlete advocacy and activism related to social justice issues and continuous scrutiny of sport bodies related to diversity of experiences and representation in leadership roles and structures.

Despite these and other concerning developments globally, there have also been pockets of recent progress that are noteworthy. Governments and public funding bodies are becoming more engaged in providing regulatory support and more explicit guidance in addressing racism and exclusion in sport. Some sport bodies and major event organisers have made formal commitments to enable greater acknowledgement of and representation from people from historically marginalised groups, for example indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and women and girls. Broad debates and discussions have developed across a number of sports on universal, accessible and inclusive organisational design and representation in leadership, including from the global south and small, and island, states. There has also been growth in new commercial deals that will provide enhanced global coverage of events from traditionally underrepresented regions.

In reality, such progress is still sporadic and limited, and much more needs to be done. The challenges of lack of representation and equal access are endemic for a variety of social reasons, cultural norms, patriarchal constructs and the legacies of historical injustices and colonialism. In 2022, the sports ecosystem will see renewed calls and campaigns to bolster existing initiatives to transparently address these issues and for new strategies that take a zero tolerance approach to racism and social injustice. If sport and its corporate and broadcast partners can fulfil their responsibilities, be proactive about their duty of care, and be more inclusive, accessible and welcoming, then the foundations can be laid for transformational leadership with real impact for people and communities.



Lewis Hamilton was subjected to racial abuse across social media following his win at the 2021 British Grand Prix (Photo by Mark Thompson/Getty Images)

05 MENTAL HEALTH AND HEALTH INEQUALITY

Addressing ongoing health impacts of Covid-19 and fresh health issues will be a priority for the sport community

Covid-19 continues to surge in many countries, and is of particular concern in areas with low vaccination rates. The effects of the pandemic on women's sport, public access to sport and the mostly still unknown long-term implications of Covid-19 we raised in 2021 continue to be of concern. Going into 2022, mental health and global health inequalities join this watch list.

The pandemic has brought mental health issues to the fore. The Tokyo Olympics saw high profile athletes pull out of events citing mental health concerns. Since 2020 athlete unions have pushed for athletes, like other workers, to be protected under ILO standards, and for recognition of the importance of mental health. With many of the world's largest sporting events convening this year, 2022 is likely to see more athletes speak up and lobby for their mental health, opening the door for workers, volunteers and others to do the same. Pressure will increase on sport federations, sponsors and others in sport to take seriously and address the mental health of athletes.

Global health inequalities drawn into sharp focus by the pandemic will also be a priority in 2022, including addressing their impacts on global sport events and athletes. The Africa Cup of Nations has been impacted by serious outbreaks of Covid-19 depleting teams' starting line-ups. This led the hosting government of Cameroon to increase testing in a bid to encourage more fans to attend matches. Access to vaccines in the Global South will remain a challenge that needs to be met with urgency and investment this year.

For the upcoming Beijing Winter Olympics, whilst vaccination will not be mandatory for athletes, those not vaccinated will face a full 21 days in quarantine – significantly affecting their preparations for the event, and will disproportionately affect athletes from countries with low vaccination rates, many of them in the Global South. While athletes were prioritised for vaccination ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, it is unclear whether this will be true for the Beijing, or whether this is warranted given the urgency of prioritising at-risk individuals.

The Australian Open controversy over Novak Djokovic and his deportation from Australia raises questions over whether athletes should be offered exemptions to travel when much of the world continues to face quarantines and other constraints, and are a reminder of the ongoing challenge of coordinating rules around events with host government regulations. Vaccination requirements and exemptions for sporting events in 2022 highlight wider health inequalities in society and will likely to continue be scrutinised.



Simone Biles pulled out of some of the gymnastics events at the Tokyo Olympic Games citing mental health issues (Image by Jamie Squire/Getty Images)

STRATEGY Q & A

In September 2021 the Centre for Sport and Human Rights launched its new strategy - [Convergence 2025](#). Our work in 2022 and beyond will be focussed on delivering the vision set out in the strategy. This Q&A explains the purpose of the strategy and how it will shape our work.

Why has the Centre launched a new strategy?

When the Centre was first launched in 2018 the Advisory Council agreed to a strategy with the intention of proving the concept of the Centre, as well as aiming to staff up and establish a fully independent organisation. By 2021 we accomplished these initial objectives and had grown the resources and team to a sufficiently stable position to become independent from IHRB, the organisation that incubated the Centre from the outset, providing the initial seed funding and support. In July of 2021, the Centre completed a global search for a new Board of Directors and became a fully independent not-for-profit organisation incorporated as an association in Switzerland and a charity in the U.K.

With strong foundations now in place, the next phase of work is to demonstrate impact. In doing so, it is important to set out ambitious and achievable objectives for the coming years. Given the diversity of institutions in our Advisory Council, it was also important for us to clarify what we do and what we don't do while articulating a refreshed statement of our mandate.

As a human rights organisation for the world of sport, we remain committed to our founding vision of catalysing positive change across the sport ecosystem that aligns with international human rights standards and the Sporting Chance Principles. What this translates to is a theory of change that promotes success by generating greater awareness of human rights risks and opportunities throughout the sport ecosystem, building capacities of all actors to deliver on their responsibilities and commitments, and promoting a world of sport that fosters lasting value for everyone involved as individuals and institutions.

Why is the new strategy called Convergence 2025?

For the change we want to see, it's important for many actors to work together collaboratively. That's how we think and that's the role we play in fostering collective action. This means bringing together influential and impactful organisations, sometimes with very different objectives and perspectives, and looking for common ground and making commitments. Human Rights provides a universal framework that can nurture cooperation and the convergence of interests and apply to everyone across the world. A human rights-based approach is people-centred, and that's at the heart of how we look to achieve change.

The world of sport is often viewed as a series of hierarchical structures of governance and ownership. This has led to power imbalances that may cause or contribute to human rights abuses of athletes and others. In order to address these concerns, our approach is to engage with the entire sport ecosystem with a common focus on people and how they are treated. Viewed this way, it becomes clear that all actors need to work towards greater "convergence" to deliver sport responsibly, where all actors involved are aware of and implement their individual and collective responsibilities to protect and respect human rights. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights provide a roadmap for leading actors in many sectors, and our goal is to promote and enable sport to implement these standards and the multi-stakeholder approach embedded within them.

What are the Centre's main strategic priorities?

Convergence 2025 sets out five strategic priority areas that frame our work. First, we'll build on our efforts to nurture thought leadership, innovation and knowledge on sport and human rights. Second, we'll engage and collaborate to help strengthen operational systems and practices in sport to enhance institutional capabilities to meet human rights responsibilities. Third, we'll foster more inclusive engagement and collective action to shape alliances aimed to create positive change in sport. Fourth, we'll work with a growing number of partners to develop systems that remedy abuse, rights violations, and other harmful practices occurring in the world of sport. And finally, we'll take steps to ensure that the Centre is a self-sustaining global organisation.

It is critical that in everything the Centre does, that the voices and agency of those directly and indirectly impacted by sport are respected and amplified. Progress has been made on that front through engagement with a range of organisations and groups around the world, but there is much work to do in building a universal, accessible and inclusive platform that ensures the authenticity of diverse perspectives are respected and represented across all of our activities.

How does the strategy set the Centre apart from other bodies in this space?

A number of things make the Centre distinct as an organisation. Most importantly we're a human rights organisation and apply international human rights standards to all of our work. In that respect we are unique in having both the International Labour Organisation and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as a formal part of our governance structure. We also have a unique governance model, where we have emerged from a multi-stakeholder process, but are a fully independent organisation, with our independence upheld by our board. More practically, our approach to our work is premised in the "principled pragmatism" that underpinned John Ruggie's work on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. On that basis, our focus is on constructive engagement with actors in the world of sport who are working to make human rights commitments and seeking to implement human rights due diligence in their own operations.

For those committed to responsible, harm-free sport, the Centre is here to help. We're not a campaigning organisation that sets out to name and shame - our focus is resolutely on the practical steps that organisations can take to effectively protect people in line with established standards. This means we bring together civil society organisations with public and private sector actors and sports organisations to identify pragmatic areas for improvement that reduce the risk of human rights harms, all rooted in the application of international human rights.

A HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATION FOR THE WORLD OF SPORT





Centre for Sport
& Human Rights

TOGETHER FOR BETTER

Contact

sporthumanrights.org